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Does Euripides Call the Gods μακάριοι?

MARIANNE McDONALD

It is likely that Euripides never applied the term μακάριος to the gods.¹ Arguments, however, must be found to show why Page and Biehl are wrong when they translate μακάριος as an epithet of the gods in *Antiope* 45 and *Orestes* 972, respectively.²

Lexica and etymological dictionaries regularly describe μακάριος in terms similar to those in Liddell-Scott: I, "mostly of men," and II, "of states, qualities, etc."³ Μακάριος is never given as an epithet of the gods. Μάκαρ, on the other hand, is applied to both gods and men from the time of Homer,⁴ and the lexica concur with Liddell-Scott's description of this term: "prop. epith. of the gods, as opp. mortal men."

A brief look at the history of the term μακάριος may help us understand Euripides' usage. The word is first found in the 5th century, in Pindar (*P.* 5, 46 Snell). The only other writers in the 5th century who use μακάριος are Euripides and Aristophanes. In *P.* 5, 46, Pindar calls the victorious

¹ This claim was first put forward in my dissertation *Terms for Happiness in Euripides* now published in *Hypomnemata* 54 (Göttingen, 1978), 231 f., 238 f., 296, 301 f.

² D. L. Page, *Select Papyri*, Loeb Classical Library (1941, reprint London, 1970), III, 66 f. Werner Biehl, *Euripides' Orestes erklärt* (Berlin, 1965), 106, and *Euripides Orestes* (Leipzig, Bibl. Teubneriana, 1975), 101.

³ Cf. P. Chantraine's entry under μάκαρ: "Sens: 'bienheureux' en parlant des dieux, en ce sens souvent au pluriel (Hom., etc.), mais peut se dire d'hommes déjà chez Hom. . . . Dérivés: μακάριος 'bienheureux, favorisé des dieux' (Pi., E., prose attique), dit des hommes, . . ." *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1968), III, 659. For the -ιος suffix, see E. Schwyzler, *Griechische Grammatik* (Munich, 1953) I, 466, and A. Meillet et J. Vendryes, *Traité de grammaire comparée des langues classiques*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1968), 389: "Le suffixe a servi en effet à tirer des adjectifs de la plupart des thèmes nominaux existants."

⁴ See note 3; the references in Homer given by Chantraine are: "ὦ μάκαρ Ἀτρείδῃ (*Il.* 3, 182), ἀνδρὸς μάκαρος pour un homme favorisé des dieux, qui est sans souci comme un dieu (*Il.* 11, 68)."

charioteer μακάριος for achieving fame after great toil. In other people's eyes he shares in a sort of divine glory. In this poem the king for whom he is driving the chariot is called μάκαρ (20), as is the king's hearth (11). A local hero, Battus, an ancestor of the king, is also called μάκαρ (94), as are the gods themselves (Κρονίδαι μάκαρες, 118). One can see the ranking: gods, hero, king (all μάκαρες, "divine"), and then the victorious driver (μακάριος, "sharing in godlike glory"). It is understandable that the driver would be on a level lower than a king, who is, of course, μάκαρ (e.g., *Il.* 3, 182). De Heer says that μακάριος may describe a person as "one who shares to a certain extent in the distinction of being μάκαρ."⁵

Aristophanes uses the term μακάριος in the same way as Euripides, in that it usually describes *men*. Aristophanes also applies it unambiguously

⁵ C. de Heer, *ΜΑΚΑΡ-ΕΥΔΑΙΜΩΝ-ΟΑΒΙΟΣ-ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5th Century B.C.* (Diss. Utrecht, Amsterdam, 1969), 31. De Heer has no example of μακάριος as applied to the gods, and when "sense components" are given for each of these four terms (p. 57), μακάριος shares seven components with μάκαρ; after component 7, de Heer states, "For μάκαρ the same numbers apply with the addition of 8: applied to the gods."

Although de Heer's work is helpful in many ways, one must use it with caution. In two tables (pp. 108-151), he says that he includes all the occurrences of the words which are the subject of his study, and then bases percentages on these occurrences (p. 58). However, he has omitted over 50% of the occurrences of these words in Euripides' fragments, and thus his percentages and statistical inferences are bound to be inaccurate. The following is a list of his omissions: *Alcestis*, εὐτυχῶν 1122, εὐτυχῶν 1158; *Medea*, εὐδαιμόνων 1025, εὐδαιμονοῖτον 1073; *Hippolytus*, ὄλβον 626 (however, 625 f. are generally regarded as spurious); *Hecuba*, εὐτυχή 330, ὄλβιου 493; *Heracleidae*, εὐδαιμονοῖτε 582, εὐτυχίς 641; *Andromache*, ὄλβιον 100; *Supplices*, ὄλβιους 5, εὐδαιμονεῖ 577; *Electra*, εὐδαιμονοίς 231, εὐτυχοῖ 1077, εὐδαιμονήσεις 1291; *Troades*, εὐτυχοῦσα 45, εὐτυχήσας 639, εὐτυχοῦντος 1162; *Helena*, εὐδαιμονίας 953 (LP reading adopted by Kannicht, rejected by Murray); *Iphigenia i.T.*, εὐτύχει 329, εὐτυχεστέροις 352 (LP reading rejected by Murray), εὐτυχοῦσα 837, εὐτυχοῖμεν 841, εὐτυχοῦμεν 850, εὐδαιμόνα 1088, εὐτυχίας 1121, εὐτυχεῖν 1183; *Ion*, εὐτυχίαις 1505; *Phoenissae*, εὐδαιμονοίς 1086, εὐτυχεῖς 1163; (*Cyclops*, μάκαρ 459: read 495); *Iphigenia i.A.*, εὐδαιμονεῖν 1161; *Bacchae*, μακάριος 1243.

The following are the omissions in the fragments (Nauck): εὐδαιμονεῖ 45; εὐτυχεῖς 47.2; εὐτυχοῦντα 99; εὐτυχεῖν 142.4; εὐτυχῶ, εὐτυχῶ 143.1 f.; εὐτυχεῖ 154.2; εὐτυχῶν 262.3; εὐδαιμονεῖ 273.3; εὐτυχεῖ 285.12; ἠτύχουν 285.20; ὄλβου 330.8; εὐτυχησάντων 362.31; εὐτυχοῦντα 402.2; εὐτυχοῦσα 409.1; εὐδαιμονεῖν 461.1; εὐτυχεῖ 463.4; εὐδαιμονοῦντων 536; εὐτυχεῖν 608.3; εὐτυχοῦντες 626.7; εὐδαιμονεῖ 661.1; εὐτυχεῖν 701; εὐτυχεῖ 730; εὐδαιμονίαν 745.2; εὐδαιμονίζων 778; εὐτυχοῦντας 901.5; εὐτυχοῦντα 1017; εὐτυχεῖ 1025.1; εὐτυχοῦσι 1056; εὐτυχεῖ 1056.3. Page, *Select Papyri* (1941; Loeb, vol. 3): *Antiope*, εὐτυχή 15; *μακαρίων* 45; εὐτυχή 102; *Hypsipyle*, ὄλβιον 79; ὄλβια 115; εὐτυχῶς 128; εὐδαιμονοίς 304; 305; εὐτυχίασιον 324; *Melanippe*, ὄλβιος 7. *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea*, ed. C. Austin: *Archelaus*, εὐτυχήσοο[19.11; *Erechtheus*, 65, μακάριος . . . εὐδαιμων col. II, 17; εὐτυχή col. II, 18; εὐτυχή col. V, 58. Also omitted are all the *Alexander* fragments; in addition to 45, 47.2, Snell fr. 6.8.

to the “blissful departed.”⁶ Again, in his works, the gods are never called *μακάριοι*. In Euripides, *μακάριος* describes men 27 times, and 17 times things rather than human beings;⁷ but these things can be easily associated with human beings (such as *χείρ, οἴκοι, γάμος*).⁸ It is never applied to the gods.

There are two late uses which may be mentioned here. (1) In Aristotle (*EN* 1178 b 9) the gods are said to be *μακάριοι καὶ εὐδαίμονες* because they engage in contemplative activity (*ἐνέργεια θεωρητική*), which is said to excel in bliss (*μακαριότης*).⁹ This predicative usage, however, is different from an attributive one.¹⁰ Authors previous to Aristotle do not even go this far. (2) Epicurus, in *Ep.* I, 78; I, 81; III, 123, and *Κύρια δόξα* 1, links the term *μακάριος* with *ἄφθαρτος*; in *Ep.* I the divine nature of celestial bodies is indicated, and *τὸ μακάριον* in *Κύρια δόξα* 1 describes the nature of the gods. Since these authors postdate Euripides, their usage does not support the interpretation of *μακάριος* in Euripides as an epithet of the gods.

⁶ Euripides does not use *μάκαρ* unambiguously as an epithet for the dead, except in the phrase “isle of the blest” (*μακάρων . . . νῆσον*, *Hel.* 1677). *Μακάριος*, however, is used to describe and praise the dead hero Erechtheus (65, col. II, 17 Austin). Both terms are often used ambiguously by Euripides, in cases where the person described is dead or will be; but the person addressed takes the term as a simple one of praise. The divine departed are most likely these described in Aristophanes *Ranae* 85 (Agathon is said to have gone *ἐς μακάρων εὐωχίαν*). In his *Ταγνησισταί* the dead are called *μακάριοι* because they take part in a drinking feast, and a dead person is *εὐδαίμων*, *δὲ οὐκ ἀνάσσειται*, fr. I.6–11 in A. Meineke, *Fragmenta Comicoorum Graecorum* (1857, reprint Berlin, 1970), II, 2, 1148.

⁷ De Heer gives 41 occurrences of *μακάριος* in Euripides (p. 146), omitting *Antiope* 45 (Page), *Erechtheus* 65, and *Bacchae* 1243.

⁸ The one possible exception is really no exception. In *Bacchae* 1171 *θήρα* is called *μακάριον* by Agave. Her hunting is seen as a divine thing and, ironically enough, the prize “beast” is her own son. Thus in this case too the association is all too human.

⁹ Professor Peter Colaclides was kind enough to point out a passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (247 a 4) where *μακάριος* and *εὐδαίμων* appear in close connection with the gods and *μακάριος* is specifically linked with *θεία* (sights, a concrete form of *θεωρία*). He also pointed out 250 b 6, where the vision (*ὄψις τε καὶ θέα*) of beauty is *μακαρία*, seen *σὺν εὐδαίμονι χορῶν*, and this is the most blest of the mysteries (*μακαριωτάτη τῶν τελετῶν*) and also *εὐδαίμονα φάσματα*. Aristotle goes much further with his image of the gods as blissful from their contemplation; but he no doubt owes much to Plato for the initial imagery of happiness linked with the gods and with a vision of beauty and goodness.

¹⁰ See note 3. In contrast to *μακάριοι*, the majority of instances of *μάκαρες* in Homer show it modifying *θεοί*; e.g., *Il.* 1, 406; 4, 127; 14, 143; *μάκαρες* describes the gods in an absolute sense in *Od.* 10, 299. Euripides has parallel instances (e.g., fr. 453.2; *Med.* 825), and he applies this term to the gods more than to human beings (see *Terms for Happiness* [note 1], 295). In *El.* 994, *Hel.* 1348, *Ba.* 378, 1339, and fr. 912.12 *μάκαρες* by itself signifies the gods; in all of the other cases where it refers to the gods, some word like *θεοί* appears.

Page, however, translates μακα]ρίων σθένος βρόχοισι καταδεῖ [τὸν ἄδικον], at *Antiope* 45 f., as “The might of the blest gods binds down the unrighteous man in the meshes of a snare.”¹¹ Given 5th century (particularly Euripidean) usage, μακαρίων is perhaps better translated “of the blest,” referring to men, not gods. This is probably a general statement by the chorus which can be specifically applied to Lycus, an unrighteous tyrant whom Zethus and Amphion, two heroes (blest men?), have just overcome, thus enforcing divine justice (cf. *Antiope* 46 f., quoted below).¹² There are parallels in Euripides which show a tyrant meeting with just destruction. In fact, another Lycus, also a tyrant of Thebes, is slain by the hero Heracles for his evil deeds, and the comment is made by Amphitryon that Lycus is entering the net of swords (βρόχοισι δ’ ἀρκύων . . . ξιφηφόροισι, *HF* 729 f.). The chorus see this as a just return for evil (734–774), and the gods (θεοί, 771) punish mortals (βροτούς, 775) for unjust deeds (ἀδίκων, 772), which is a parallel to βροτῶν δ’ αὖ τέχναις [τ]ί[ς] ἔφυγεν θε]όν; of *Antiope* 46 f. Both the situation and the imagery of the two passages are parallel.

On the other hand, Wilamowitz’ restoration μακα]ρίων is by no means the only possibility:¹³ for instance, ἀγ]ρίων might be a better reading, appropriate to the hunting imagery (cf. *HF* 1210, κατὰσχεθε λέοντος ἀγρίου θυμόν). There is another possibility too: Euripides often calls a tyrant μακάριος, or if not a tyrant, someone who is powerful and wealthy.¹⁴ Many times he comes to a bad end as a result of his evil deeds. It would seem, in Euripides, that wealth and power are corrupting agents if they are exclusive source of happiness (i.e., a reason why people are called μακάριοι).¹⁵ Lycus was a tyrant who could be called μακάριος on account

¹¹ Page follows Wilamowitz in adopting the reading μακα]ρίων here; Wilamowitz’ complete reading is φονίσις μακα]ρίων.

¹² The image of the net/snare is a frequent one in the *Oresteia*: Agamemnon’s crimson robe becomes the net of his destruction (see Clytemnestra’s speech, *Ag.* 1372 ff., and Fraenkel, Page, ad 1382). In Euripides’ *Bacchae* the net image describes Dionysus’ snare for Pentheus, and the term βρόχος appears again (*Ba.* 1020 ff.; cf. also 848).

¹³ In dealing with the word-end -ρίων, one may either interpret it as belonging to a word in close association with σθένος, or as an independent genitive, modifying or associated with something omitted. If it is linked with σθένος it may have either a positive or a negative meaning, depending on whether one regards the strength as coming from the gods/heroes or the wrongdoer. For example, the following words (all of which occur in Euripides) could belong in the positive category: ἀλεξήτριος, καιρίος, κύριος, λυτήριος, σωτήριος. In the negative category appear ἄγριος, ἡμέριος, θούριος, λάθριος, δλέθριος. For the metrics involved, see J. Kambitsis, *L’Antiope d’Euripide* (Athens, 1972), 111, and H. J. Mette, *Lustrum* 12 (1967), 74.

¹⁴ *Terms for Happiness*, 296, sections I and III.

¹⁵ Cf. *HF* 1425 f., ὅστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων / ἀγαθῶν πεπᾶσθαι βούλεται, κακῶς φρονεῖ.

of his wealth and power, but he abused these resources and came to a bad end: *μακα]ρίων* in *Antiope* 45 might refer to a class of tyrants who took unjust advantage of their resources and were punished. Thus one might read something like this: *ὁ θεὸς μακα]ρίων σθένος βρόχοισι καταδεῖ*, “god binds down the might of ‘the blissful’ in the meshes of a snare,” (paraphrasing Page).

The interpretation given *μακαρίων* as “of blest heroes” may have some parallels in Euripides, too. Agave describes Cadmus as *μακάριος* because of the heroic deeds accomplished by his daughters (*Ba.* 1242 f.); so also the prize “beast” is called *μακάριον* (*Ba.* 1171, see note 8). Then the “hero” Dolon will be called *μακάριος* if he achieves the heroic tasks which will make him famous (*Rh.* 196).¹⁶ In each of these cases tragic irony is involved; Amphion and Zethus are more truly heroic than these “heroes.”

Various solutions to *]ρίων* have just been suggested. The only solution which is not possible, given Euripidean usage, is the one chosen by Page, namely translating *μακα]ρίων* as “of the blest gods.”

Now let us look at the passage *Orestes* 971–975, as interpreted by Biehl, who seems to make the same error. The context of the passage also deals with the downfall of a tyrant:

*βέβακε γὰρ βέβακεν, οἴχεται τέκνων
πρόπασα γένηα Πέλοπος ὃ τ' ἐπὶ μακαρίοις
ζῆλος ὦν ποτ' οἶκος·
φθόνος νιν εἶλε θεόθεν, ᾗ
τε δυσμενῆς φοινία
975 ψῆφος ἐν πολίταις.*

973 ζῆλος Musgrave: ζηλωτὸς codd. οἴκοις Musgrave

Biehl translates *μακαρίοις* as “bei den seligen Göttern” (in 1965),¹⁷ while commenting (in 1975): “ἐπὶ . . . ζῆλος: *nescio an tmesis sit* (i.e. ἐπίζηλος?): ὃ . . . ἐπὶ μακαρίοις ζῆλος ὦν ποτ' οἶκος ∞ ὃ (τοῖς) μακαρίοις ἐπίζηλος ὦν ποτ' οἶκος (‘domus, quae olim dis praeter omnes aemulanda erat’).” If, however, one accepts Musgrave’s *οἴκοις* for *οἶκος*, the interpretation seems to be easier: the tyrant’s house is described as once *μακάριος* (cf. *Tr.* 365, *πόλιν . . . μακαριωτέραν*). A parallel passage may be found in *Or.* 4 f., which describes the fall of Pelops’ father Tantalus, a man

¹⁶ One must be careful in citing this as an example of Euripidean usage, because the *Rhesus* may not be by Euripides: see *Terms for Happiness in Euripides*, Appendix II, pp. 309–314. Compare, however, W. Ritchie, *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides* (Cambridge, 1964), 345 ff.

¹⁷ In a footnote (p. 81), de Heer comments on Biehl’s rendering, “this must be due to faulty construing.”

who once was *μακάριος*: in both cases human happiness is regarded as transient.

But with the transmitted reading *οἶκος* one may find a suitable meaning for *ἐπὶ μακαρίοις*: "the house once envied for bliss," (Wedd; *ἐπί* denoting the grounds of the envy, *μακαρίοις* being used as a neuter substantive);¹⁸ "la maison dont la félicité était jadis un objet d'envie" (L. Méridier).¹⁹

One can understand why Biehl thinks Pelops' house might be a special object of envy (*ζήλος*) "in the eyes of the blest gods," in view of the following line, *φθόνος νιν εἶλε θεόθεν*. But the image seems to become stronger if we see *μακαρίοις* as representing the height from which the line of Pelops fell, rather than as a simple parallel to line 973. *Orestes* 4 ff. describe this fall from bliss. (Compare the *μακάριοι τύραννοι*, *El.* 709 f., whom the masses come to admire and for whom disaster is imminent; once again these *μακάριοι τύραννοι* are from the line of Pelops. The chorus tells of the tyrants' fall from bliss because of their evil deeds, and human weakness is opposed to divine might, 727-746.)

There are other instances, too, where *μακάριος* (never *μάκαρ*) describes the powerful and wealthy in Euripides: *Troades* 1170 (Astyanax) and *Orestes* 86 (Helen and Menelaus). In the former case Hecuba's use is pathetic (Astyanax is now dead). In her dirge she speaks of the happiness which might have been his and would have come from his youth, marriage and *ισόθεος τυραννίς*, royal power which would have made him the gods' equal, thus *μακάριος*. However, she quickly adds, *εἴ τι τῶνδε μακάριον* (*Tr.* 1170), speculating herself on whether externals such as marriage and royal power are true sources of happiness (influenced no doubt by her present experience).²⁰

In *Or.* 86 Electra's use of *μακάριος* is ironic (as it is in *Electra* 1006, when she calls Clytemnestra's hand *μακαρία*). In both cases she is vividly aware of her lowly station in contrast to these royal beings (Helen, Menelaus, and Clytemnestra), and she plots to destroy their "bliss" by murder. Murder seems to be a constant threat in Euripides to the *μακάριοι*, and there also seems to be a play on this word as an epithet for the dead. Thus,

¹⁸ N. Wedd, *Euripides, The Orestes* (Cambridge, 1926), 121.

¹⁹ Budé, 1959, translating F. Chapoutier's text: *ζήλος . . . οἶκος*. The majority of the editors, however, adopt Musgrave's conjecture *οἴκοις*, including G. Murray (1913), A. S. Way (Loeb, 1912), V. di Benedetto (Florence, 1965).

²⁰ See *Terms for Happiness*, 213 f. Ion too questions royal power as a source of happiness (*Ion* 621-632); if a man lacks peace and must always fear for his life, can this man be called happy? In both cases (Hecuba's and Ion's) *μακάριος* seems to describe a man who can be at peace and enjoy a life of ease and security, such as the gods enjoy, and a tyrant does not fit this description.

whenever Euripides uses *μακάριος* to describe people elevated above mankind because of their wealth and power, some sort of contrast is implied, and in most cases a fall has already occurred or is about to occur. The question is raised also about the value of this type of happiness, possibly on the grounds that it is not lasting; it is certainly not carefree. One thinks of the maxim which has haunted Greek literature since the Solon–Croesus confrontation (Herodotus 1.30–32): do not call a man happy until his death.²¹

In conclusion, *μακάριος* at *Orestes* 972 most probably refers to *οἶκος*, not to “the blest gods” (Biehl): “the house of Pelops, once an object of envy for its bliss.” It is highly unlikely that Euripides was using *μακάριος*, in either *Antiope* 45 or *Orestes* 972, in such a strikingly novel fashion as Page and Biehl claim. If he used it as a synonym for *μάκαρ* as an epithet of the gods, it would be contrary to his own practice, and that of his contemporaries.

University of California, Irvine

²¹ See *Terms for Happiness*, pp. 22–24.